WILDC.A.T.S

COVERT·ACTION TEAMS

BRETT BOOTH
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DC

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JUNE

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COVERT·ACTION·TEAMS

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AUGUST 7, 1992
9:00 P.M.

IN THE HEART OF MIDTOWN MANHATTAN, THE **HALO BUILDING** GLEAMS IN THE SUNSET LIKE A CRIMSON OBELISK.

BY NOW, EVERYONE HAS LEFT ITS OFFICES FOR THE WEEKEND, AND THE HALLWAYS OF HALO ARE QUIET--

--A STARK CONTRAST TO THE BUZZ OF INTENSE ACTIVITY THAT PERMEATES THE ATMOSPHERE HERE DURING THE WEEK.

IT IS BUT A SMALL PIECE OF A MAMMOTH CORPORATE EMPIRE BUILT BY THE MAVERICK INDUSTRIAL MOGUL, **JACOB MARLOWE.**

THE CALM AND DIGNIFIED PHOTOGRAPH OF THE MAN BELIES THE HYPERKINETIC ENERGY WITHIN HIM. IN ONLY TWO YEARS, MARLOWE HAS GONE FROM BEING A HOMELESS PERSON TO A MULTI-BILLIONAIRE WITH TRANS-NATIONAL INTERESTS.

IN CONTRAST, **VOID,** THE WOMAN BEHIND THE SUCCESSFUL MAN, QUIETLY MEDITATES WITHIN THE HALO BUILDING'S PENTHOUSE SANCTUM, REACHING OUT WITH HER COSMIC POWERS...

...IN SEARCH OF THE FINAL GIFTED ONE WHO WILL BE NEEDED IN THE COMING BATTLE FOR POSSESSION OF A MYSTERIOUS ORB THAT PERVADES HER DREAMS. HOWEVER, DARKER THOUGHTS SOON INTRUDE AND SHE IS LOST IN A MAELSTROM OF EMOTIONAL TURMOIL...

...AS MOMENTS OF TIME FLASH THROUGH HER MIND AND SHE HAS GLIMPSES OF AN EARLIER TIME WHEN SHE WAS ONCE...

JULY 28, 1980

MIR SPACE STATION PUSTOTA

VEEP VEEP VEEP

"<MAJOR TERESHKOVA! THE PROXIMITY ALARM!>"

"<THERE IS NO NEED TO SHOUT, CAPTAIN LEONOV. I HEAR IT, LIEUTENANT GAGARIN, TELEMETRY REPORT!>"

<COMING ON LINE, MAJOR! AN UNIDENTIFIED OBJECT IS EARTHBOUND AT EV-5!* IT SHOULD BE ON YOUR SCREEN, NOW-->

<THE OBJECT'S TRAJECTORY, CAPTAIN?>

<IT'S...IT'S CHANGED HEADING!>

*ESCAPE VELOCITY x5

<WHAT?! NO! IT IS HEADED STRAIGHT FOR US!>

<LEONOV! FIRE THRUSTERS! EVASIVE ACTION! GAGARIN, NOTIFY BAIKONUR-->

"<TOO LATE, MAJOR. IT IS GOING TO...>

"K...HIT.)"

THERE IS NO TIME EVEN TO SCREAM AS THE MIR SPACE STATION DISINTEGRATES UPON IMPACT.

THE SHATTERED DEBRIS FLOATS MOMENTARILY IN SPACE FOR A FEW BRIEF MOMENTS BEFORE EARTH'S GRAVITY BEGINS TO DRAW IT DOWN.

AS THE SCATTERED REMNANTS OF THE VOID GATHER SPEED DURING RE-ENTRY, MOST OF IT BURNS UP IN THE EARTH'S ATMOSPHERE.

CCCP

EXCEPT FOR A LONE SHARD THAT ROCKETS DOWN AND SMASHES INTO THE HEART OF ANTARCTICA.

KRAKA

BOOM!

LEAVING ONLY A GIGANTIC CRATER AS A FINAL TESTAMENT TO THE DEMOLISHED SOVIET SPACE STATION AND ITS THREE HAPLESS COSMONAUTS.

NOOOOo!

VOID, ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?!

WE HEARD YA SCREAMING. WHAT'S GOING ON?

I...WITNESSED MY OWN DEATH. THE DEATH OF MAJOR ADRIANNA TERESHKOVA.

THE SOVIET COSMONAUT? BUT WASN'T SHE LOST WITH THE MIR SPACE STATION *PUSTOTA*?

PUSTOTA IS RUSSIAN FOR THE WORD, VOID.

THIS IS CONNECTED TO YOUR DREAMS ABOUT THE ORB, ISN'T IT?

YES, JACOB. I AM AFRAID SO.

I SENSE A CRUCIAL CONVERGENCE OF TIME LINES NEARING.

THROUGH THESE TIMELINES, I HAVE SEEN MOMENTS OF MY LIFE FROM THE PAST AS WELL AS THOSE FROM THE FUTURE. ALL OF THEM FOCUS UPON AN ORB OF FANTASTIC POWER.

SHOULD IT FALL INTO THE WRONG HANDS, THE ENTIRE WORLD SHALL PAY THE PRICE.

THAT MUST BE HELSPONT AND THE CABAL. THEY'RE FINALLY MAKING THEIR MOVE!

YOU TOLD ME THIS DAY WOULD COME, VOID...OR SHOULD I CALL YOU ADRIANNA.

beepbeep

HOLD ON A SECOND. WHAT'S UP, *JULES?*

A TRANSMISSION FROM THE GNOME, SIR.

WHAT'S HE WANT?

HE SAYS HE KNOWS THE LOCATION OF ANOTHER GIFTED ONE. IF YOU'RE INTERESTED HIS CONTACT WILL MEET YOU AT THE MELLON-FELLER DINNER TONIGHT.

TELL 'IM I'LL BE THERE.

YES, SIR.

ALL OF THIS IS HAPPENING SO QUICKLY, SIR. IS IT WISE TO GO BY YOURSELF?

HADRIAN MAY BE CORRECT, JACOB. THE CABAL WILL SURELY BE SEARCHING FOR THIS GIFTED ONE AS WELL.

DON'T WORRY, THEY'VE GOT NO IDEA WE EVEN EXIST. AND JUST BECAUSE I NEED THE GNOME DON'T MEAN I TRUST HIM. I'LL BE CAREFUL.

AFTER ALL THESE MONTHS OF TRAINING AND PREPARATION, WE'RE FINALLY GOING INTO BATTLE. WITH THE TEAM WE'VE ASSEMBLED, WE SHOULD BE READY FOR ANYTHING THEY THROW AT US.

IS THE CABAL REALLY THAT DANGEROUS, ADRIANNA?

PERHAPS MORE THAN WE IMAGINE, HADRIAN.

WARBLADE

THEIR LEADER, THE ONE CALLED HELSPONT, HAS MANAGED TO UNITE ALL THE DUKES UNDER THE CABAL.

WITH THEIR COMBINED MIGHT, THE GOAL OF WORLD DOMINATION IS WELL WITHIN THEIR GRASP.

WE MAY BE ALL THAT STANDS IN THEIR WAY. LET US HOPE THAT JACOB CAN FIND US ANOTHER ALLY TONIGHT.

LATER ON THAT NIGHT...

YOU'RE THE CONTACT?!

THE LOCATION FOR THE MEETING SITE IS ON THIS DISK, MR. MARLOWE. MASTER GNOME WILL BE WAITING.

SOUNDS SIMPLE ENOUGH.

AND NOW THAT WE'RE DONE WITH BUSINESS, CAN I INTEREST YOU IN JOINING ME FOR SOME PLEASURE?

SLAP!

I GUESS NOT.

WAIT A MINUTE! I DIDN'T MEAN TO...

AS THE EARLY EVENING TURNS TO NIGHT...

...JACOB MARLOWE FINDS HIMSELF BACK IN HIS OLD STOMPING GROUNDS SEEKING COMFORT FROM A FAMILIAR FRIEND.

:EERRP!: WHO... THE #@!?%...DO THEY...THINK I AM?! I'M NO @O#☆ HERO...

CRAASH!

WHA...WHAT WAS THAT?!

A CIVILIAN WITNESS! WHAT DO WE DO WITH HIM, BLUE LEADER?

NOT OUR PROBLEM. WE STAY ON VELOCITY'S TRAIL, BLUE LEADER TO RED DOG...

NO! WAIT! DON'T GO...

...DON'T LEAVE ME.

IN THE END, SLEEP FINALLY OVERWHELMS JACOB MARLOWE AND HE FINDS REFUGE FROM HIS PAIN IN THE DARKNESS.

AUGUST 8

10:00 A.M.

HADRIAN, ANY WORD FROM JACOB?

NOT YET.

I HOPE HE HASN'T RUN INTO ANY TROUBLE.

IF I COULD, I'D BE WORRIED. BUT MY PROGRAMMING SAVES ME THE AGGRAVATION.

SOMETHING IS BOTHERING YOU, HADRIAN, NO?

I'VE BEEN THINKING ABOUT THE NEW GIFTED ONE THAT THE GNOME'S OFFERING US.

THE ONES WE'VE RECRUITED THROUGH HIM ARE MORE POWERFUL THAN I EVER COULD'VE IMAGINED.

IF ANY OF THEM HAD FALLEN INTO THE HANDS OF THE CABAL...

"...WHEN YOU DO THAT!"

UNNN

WHAT KEPT YOU, COACH?

I GOT BETTER THINGS TO DO THAN WATCH YOU AND VOID DO PARLOR TRICKS.

THEN IT'S TIME TO PUT YOUR MONEY WHERE YOUR MOUTH IS, WARBLADE.

HADRIAN, THIS IS JULES. MR. MARLOWE'S JUST ENTERED THE LOBBY. STANSFIELD AND I ARE ON OUR WAY TO MEET HIM.

NO! I WAS SUPPOSED TO RUN MAUL AND WARBLADE THROUGH A CTR SESSION BEFORE HE GOT BACK!

I'LL KEEP HIM BUSY. GO START YOUR WORKOUT.

BUT I HAVE TO GET DOWN THERE...

LET ME TAKE CARE OF THAT.

UNNN

VOID! STOP! I HATE IT...

SO WHAT ARE WE DOING TODAY, SPARTAN?

FULL SPEED SESSION, GENTLEMEN. NO HOLDS BARRED.

MAKE A MISTAKE NOW AND YOU'LL END UP IN THE INFIRMARY...OR WORSE.

HOOYAH! IT'S TIME TO HAND OUT THE BEATDOWN!

MAUL! COVER WARBLADE'S BACK BUT KEEP YOUR SIZE IN CHECK! I DON'T WANT YOU LOSING CONTROL AGAIN.

GOOD JOB, WARBLADE!

WE'VE GOT TO CUT THROUGH THESE BATTLE-DROIDS AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE. GIVE THEM TIME TO REACT AND THEY'LL OVERWHELM US.

THINK OF IT AS A CONSTRUCTIVE WAY TO EXPLOIT THAT TEMPER OF YOURS.

A HIGHLY ADVANCED CYBER-SYNTHETIC HUMANOID CAPABLE OF CREATING DEVASTATING ENERGY BLASTS AS WELL AS POWERFUL DEFENSIVE SHIELDS, SPARTAN IS A WARRIOR-BORN WITH ONLY A SINGLE GOAL: VICTORY AT ANY PRICE.

ALL RIGHT, GENTLEMEN, THIS IS THE LAST LINE OF BATTLE-DROIDS. THEY'RE SET TO INCAPACITATE.

WARNING. SURRENDER OR BE DESTROYED.

I'M NOT EVEN BREAKIN' A SWEAT YET, SPARTAN.

WISH I HAD BREAKFAST THIS MORNING. I'M SO HUNGRY THESE DROIDS ARE LOOK-ING PRETTY GOOD.

LET YOUR GUARD DOWN AND I'LL BE CARRYING YOU OUT... IN PIECES.

THERE IS NO QUESTION OF THE OUTCOME.

SHRAKOW!

THIS BATTLE IS...

...QUICK...

VNG!

AARRHH!

EEEP

...BRIEF...

...AND FINAL!

KRUUNNCH!

401250

AAHHRR

GOOD JOB! YOU GENTLEMEN ARE LIVING UP TO YOUR CODE-NAMES.

I'M GETTING TIRED OF THESE PRACTICE DUMMIES, SPARTAN.

WHEN DO WE GO UP AGAINST THE VARSITY?

FROM WHAT MR. MARLOWE'S TOLD ME, SOONER THAN YOU THINK, WARBLADE.

TAKE A BREATHER FOR A WHILE.

BUT STAY TOGETHER. WE'LL BE DOING ANOTHER *CTR* SESSION FOR MR. MARLOWE IN A FEW HOURS.

WAIT A MINUTE, COACH.

YOU TELLIN' ME I GOTTA BABYSIT THE DINOSAUR HERE?

:PTUUI:

DINOSAUR, HUH?

PTANG!

HHEYY!!

THAT DOES IT!

HE DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING ABOUT KEEPING YOU IN ONE PIECE.

I SAY WE PLAY "TAG", LITTLE MAN--*AND YOU'RE*

SO YOU WANNA PLAY SOME MORE, WARBLADE?

WAIT A SEC— *UUNGHHK!*

THOOM!

SLAASH!

KRAK!

ELSEWHERE...

IT'S ALWAYS A PLEASURE DOING BUSINESS WITH YOU, GNOME.

LIKEWISE, SIGNOR CASSINI.

EVERY BIT OF KNOWLEDGE YOU PROVIDE IS IN-VALUABLE TO ME AND QUITE PROFITABLE FOR YOU.

SO, SIGNOR, YOU HAVE THE LOCATION OF THE THIRD GIFTED ONE FOR ME, YES?

SI. SHE WORKS IN A NIGHTCLUB IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

IT IS CALLED THE *HOT SPOT.*

VREEP! VREEP! VREEP! VREEP!

WAIT! THE PERIMETER SENSORS! WE HAVE INTRUDERS!

SPIES?! DISPOSE OF THEM AT ONCE, MY CODA!

I TOLD YOU THAT WAS A SENSOR BACK THERE!

THERE! IT IS SISTER ZEALOT AND THE GRIFTER!

I THOUGHT I'D KILLED BOTH OF YOU THE LAST WE MET!

WHAT NOW?

WE FIGHT OUR WAY OUT!

HOLD IT, ZEALOT! WE'VE GOTTA GET TO THAT GIFTED ONE!

SHE MAY BE THE ONE WITH THE SIGHT.

THEN YOU GO. I SHALL STALL THEM.

LISTEN TO ME FOR ONCE! WE'VE GOT TO STICK TOGETHER ON THIS ONE.

ZAMPA!

YOUUU SSSHALL NOT LEEAVE THISSS PLACCCE ALIIIVE!

SLAG!

%$@#! CASSINI OR THE GNOME MUST'VE HIRED THE TRIAD!

BUT WHERE ARE ATTICA AND *HARM*?!

RIGHT WHERE YOU WISH WE WEREN'T!

VERY WELL, BROTHER GRIFTER. WE DO IT YOUR WAY.

FOR NOW.

THE GRIFTER AND ZEALOT! WE'LL GET A SWEET PRICE FOR YOUR HEADS FROM THE CABAL.

THERE'S NO GOIN' BACK, ZEALOT...

THEN WE GO FORWARD AND FIGHT THEM TO THE DEATH!

NOT EXACTLY WHAT I HAD IN-- HEY!

WHAT'RE YOU DOING?!

NO TIME TO ARGUE, BROTHER GRIFTER!

THE PRECEPTS PREVENT ME FROM LEAVING...

...SO YOU MUST FIND THE GIFTED ONE!

DO NOT FAIL ME, BROTHER GRIFTER!

I SHALL JOIN YOU LATER. I *PROMISE*.

ZEALOT! STOP! I CAN'T JUST LEAVE--

GOOD LUCK, YOU STUBBORN WITCH.

UUNNGH! DAMN YOU, ZEALOT!

WHAT THE HELL, AT LEAST IT'LL BE A FAIR FIGHT NOW.

FOOLISSSH WOMAN!

YOU MAY BE A CODA ASSASSIN, ZEALOT, BUT THERE'S STILL ONLY ONE OF YOU...

...AND THREE OF US. TIME TO DIE.

IF THAT BE TRUE, THEN COME, YOU MERCENARIES.

TASTE THE STEEL OF MY BLADES...

...AND JOIN ME ON THE FINAL PASSAGE TO THE GREAT BEYOND!

AFTER A LONG HARD RIDE THROUGH THE NIGHT...

HOPE THE DAEMONITES HAVEN'T ARRIVED YET.

IF ZEALOT'S HUNCH ABOUT THIS ONE HAVING THE SIGHT IS RIGHT, SHE'LL BE THE ONE WE NEED TO STOP THEM.

SO *THIS* IS THE HOT SPOT?!

ZEALOT'S GOING TO LOVE THIS.

WHO KNOWS.

MAYBE THE GIFTED ONE'LL BE THE OPENING ACT.

YEAH, AND MAYBE THE CUBS WILL WIN THE WORLD SERIES.

CAN'T BELIEVE HOW NERVOUS I AM, JANICE.

THINGS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN TOUGH IN MY LIFE. THIS GIG'S THE FIRST BREAK I'VE EVER HAD.

LOOK, KID-- YOU'RE SPECIAL. A REAL LOOKER.

YOU'LL KNOCK 'EM DEAD TONIGHT.

ONLY PROBLEM IS GOING TO BE TRYING TO FIND HER.

COULD BE ANYBODY IN THIS PLACE.

THE HOT SPOT

YOU'RE A SIGHT FOR SORE EYES, PRIS BABY.

YOU REALLY THINK SO, LOUIE?

DRESSING ROOM

PRIS, BAAABY!

YOU ARE TRULY GIFTED!

HEY! I WUZ SUPPOSED TO WEAR THE VOODOO OUTFIT TONIGHT!

SHADDUP, TANYA. CAN'T YOU SEE THE KID HERE'S A NATURAL FOR IT?

THANKS, JANICE, FOR ALL YOUR HELP.

I'VE GOT A FEELING THINGS ARE FINALLY GOING TO GO MY WAY TONIGHT.

THE BEGINNING

ZONE